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## THE PAMPERED CHILDREN OF THE POOR.

AMERICA has long been held up to international condemnation and derision as the habitat of the unlicked cub, the child so pampered and ill-bred as to be a nuisance to all with whom he came in contact. Kipling's "Captains Courageous" introduces a boy of this type and then shows the transformation scene, in which a single knock-down blow, followed by familiar association with a crew of honest, self-respecting fishermen, changes him, as in the twinkling of an eye, into an industrious and tractable lad delighting in the labor and the rude manner of life that he would previously have most heartily loathed.

Now, if the reformation be indeed so easily and quickly effected, the evil is comparatively slight, albeit the comfort of the general public may at times be interfered with by these obstreperous young Americans. But we fear that since the passing of the age of miracles such sudden conversions have been somewhat rare. Fortunately, it is permissible to question whether Harvey Cheyne in his unregenerate state was a truly typical American boy of his class; and, still more skeptically, whether the father's sense of total irresponsibility for the training of his son, beyond the lavishing of unlimited money upon him, is truly characteristic of a clever American business man—self-made, besides, and not blinded by an overweening desire for social distinction.

Even if other influences had not combined to make wealthy Americans realize the exacting responsibilities and the momentous problems that the future is sure to thrust upon their sons, the many accounts recently given to the world of the rigorous training to which royal children and those of noble birth in foreign countries are subjected, would have had their influence in establishing a standard for those claiming to be the aristocracy of America. Similarly, the knowledge that the young children of our financial princes lead carefully regulated and comparatively simple lives has its influence over

many aspirants to social honors who would never have evolved so wholesome a system by themselves.

No doubt some of the *nouveaux riches*, dazzled by the glitter of their recent acquisitions, and imitating the follies rather than the virtues of their new and only partially understood associates, continue to lay themselves and their children open to all the old accusations. But on the whole it would seem that, whatever may once have been true, the "pampered children of the rich" are now a decidedly less numerous class than the panegyrists of poverty as a thing good in itself would have us believe.

The independent thinking classes, of course, have had their attention called repeatedly and imperatively to the question of how to direct the education of children in a more rational manner. For a generation no subject has received more careful thought, more earnest and able discussion by tongue and pen; and the discussion has by no means proved fruitless. We are at last learning to interrogate nature and ponder the records of experience in this science as in others, to probe the innate qualities and laws of the child-nature, and modestly to form and frequently to readjust our theories and methods in conformity to them.

The good effects of all this thought and labor have extended beyond those classes of the community that have taken an active part in educational reform. The growing appreciation of the impossibility of much radical change in adult character and habits has inspired most zealous effort in social reformers to bring good influences to bear as early and as effectively as possible upon the children of the masses, whom they seek to uplift. Moved with heartfelt pity by the dreary surroundings and unalleviated misery of the "submerged tenth," they have resolved to count no sacrifice too great that shall bring a gleam of sunshine and happiness to the hearts of the children of the poor.

Hence the establishment and multiplication of such beneficent innovations as the day nursery, the free kindergarten, the light, sunny and attractive schoolroom, the public playgrounds, baths and parks. Hence also the greater gentleness

with which children are treated, the sympathy with their feelings and wishes, and the general conviction that little children have an inalienable right to opportunities for healthy development of body and mind, and that it is the duty of all adults to help secure a reasonable degree of happiness to the only portion of the populace whose lives they can hope to brighten to any appreciable extent.

But alas! in the pleasurable glow caused by a species of well-doing so fascinating and apparently so hopeful as work with small children, we are in danger of forgetting our fundamental purpose, to develop in them during their impressionable years the virtues that we found it impossible to graft upon the character of their parents; to inspire in them the qualities that shall make them in turn centres of good influence and valuable members of the community. If it were not for the uncomfortable tendency of children to grow up, we could all devise and carry out systems of education that should be satisfactory and delightful to everybody concerned. To make childhood a happy season we should, of course, cheerfully sacrifice our own wishes and comfort; but that the child should discover the paramount importance of his own happiness and found his infantile philosophy upon that thesis is a serious misfortune to him as well as to his parents and teachers, and a misfortune whose evil effects only increase as the years go by.

While we assert with pardonable pride that any American boy, however lowly his birth, may aspire to, and perhaps receive, the highest honors in the nation's gift, yet the predictions that may not be arbitrarily made with respect to individual cases still hold true when applied to averages. It is useless to deny that the majority of the children of poor and ignorant parents will lead lives of much hardship and meager opportunities. Hence a truly wise system of education for them will not ignore these depressing facts, but will aim to fit such children for making the best of the inevitable conditions and of themselves as hampered by them. Now, for those destined to a life of disillusionment and hardship—and that means the vast majority of us all—the qualities most invaluable, after truthfulness, industry, and respect for law and jus-

tice, are perhaps resourcefulness and cheerful courage. If we seek evidences of these qualities among our public school children, if we seriously and without prejudice ask what the schools are doing to cultivate them, the results of our investigations are likely to prove sadly disheartening.

It would seem that most of the triumphs of the new education are confined to the very first steps in the process. Without captious criticism we may call attention to the fact that almost any method of education showing even a tolerable degree of sympathy with the childish point of view may secure highly gratifying results in dealing with children just beginning their school life. At that period they are continually discovering new powers in themselves and new wonders in the outside world, and find exercise of both mind and body delightful for its own sake. But, after a few years, school life loses its novelty and the inevitable discovery is made that work is different from play. At the same time evil germs inherent in the disposition begin to manifest alarming vitality and vigor. The almost invisible stimulus and restraint that sufficed with the kindergarten children becomes ineffective with the more sophisticated older pupils, hardened by the training of the streets and by increasing contact with the outside world. The savage discipline of the pedagogue of former generations would be an impossible anachronism to-day, but the discovery of the right substitute for it is reserved for the future; and the long postponement of that discovery is making of our boasted school system something terribly like a failure.

Not that our elaborate courses of study, or the speeches and writings of optimistic theorists, suggest this haunting word; but the practical workers are beginning to bear an ominous resemblance to the augurs of Rome's decadence—only when they meet it is not smiles that they find difficulty in repressing, but despairing admissions that most of their labor is in vain. When able and conscientious teachers of the older pupils aver that half of the young people under their charge would be receiving a more valuable training of mind and character by work at almost any business or trade, it indicates something intrinsically wrong in the schools as they are.

The theorizers and sanguine experimenters can not be expected to point out the elements of danger. Parents, indeed, chant a monotonous chorus of dissatisfaction, but, with the too partial eye of affection, fail to see the innate unteachableness of their own offspring or to realize that they are themselves to blame for much of it. Teachers are weighed down with consciousness of failure and ready to beat their breasts and cry "*Mea culpa*," but the majority of them lack the courage to ascribe the condition to its actual causes, and the rest know too well that words, however vigorous, will be ineffectual and yet that the times require the inauguration and enforcement of radical changes.

The explicit statements in this essay are based on personal experience in high-school teaching in a great city with a very large foreign population, and on the testimony of others engaged in the same work. Probably most, if not all, of these criticisms would apply equally well to other cities.

Unbridled and unblushing conceit pervades the school atmosphere of to-day. The well-meant efforts of teachers in the lower schools to lead children to express their ideas freely, and the encouragement given to any attempt, however feeble, have established a precedent according to which the pupils demand perpetual tribute of enthusiastic praise. And this supreme self-complacency is accompanied by a total lack of respect for superior ability or more exhaustive knowledge. These girls and boys, fresh from the grammar schools, will airily contradict an expert on his own speciality, while attempts to convince them that such conduct savors of impropriety or presumption fall on unheeding ears. The laws of the scientist or the linguist, questions of taste, or the profoundest problems of philosophy are pronounced upon with equal cocksureness. Counter pleas may indeed be offered, or evidence in rebuttal, but all on a plane of perfect equality. An intimation that on certain subjects they possess neither the data nor the mental power and training for correct judgment lays a teacher open to the charge of eccentricity and rank tyranny. It is perhaps on pedagogical questions that they pronounce with the most unerring inspiration, dogmatizing where

competent authorities venture only to suggest, and criticising and reprimanding their teachers with an effrontery that would be laughable if it were less disgraceful.

A moderate amount of this discussion might seem to indicate an admirable independence, a commendable spirit of investigation. But it is speedily evident that there has been no investigation whatever and no weighing of evidence. The so-called arguments, couched in whatever form of speech, when reduced to their lowest terms amount simply to an expression of personal preference.

And just here we touch the root of the disease, in so far as so multiform an evil can be ascribed to a single source. These children are individually the centres of their own universe; and the laws of nature and of man sink into insignificance when in conflict with their good pleasure or convenience. The delusion is so extreme as to be almost a mania, and it permeates and poisons the very essence of their work and character.

The belief that all their lessons should be made pleasant and easy for them is so deeply rooted as to have the authority of an axiom, and whatever controverts it is either reduced to an absurdity or causes consternation and righteous wrath. The custom of the teacher's going over every step of each lesson with the class before they study it at all has become so universal in the grammar schools as to possess the full power and sanctity of tradition. Accordingly, the assignment of any portion of a lesson to be prepared directly from the text-book is as unheeded as the vagaries of a harmless lunatic. If afterwards called to account for this neglect, the pupils whiningly protest the impossibility of such a feat; and further insistence rouses the determined opposition due to an attack on one's most sacred rights and immunities.

All teachers know to their sorrow that writers of text-books often sacrifice simplicity to a fancied necessity for exhibiting their complete mastery of the subject. As a result the instructor must often not only amplify and illustrate the matter of the text-book but translate it, sentence by sentence, into a form intelligible to childish or immature minds. On the other hand, there is occasionally a book—and a sentence or two

here and there in almost any book meant for children—that requires no preliminary interpretation. And surely one very important function of the school is that of training its pupils to extract the meaning from a printed sentence without requiring a *viva voce* explanation of it.

The realization that there was formerly a vast amount of unintelligent memorizing of lessons made conscientious teachers resolve that every sentence should be made a transparent medium for thought. But their assumption of the entire burden upon themselves, and the extreme to which the discarding of text-books is now carried, are among the agencies that are making our city children strangers to thoughtful books, readers, at best, of nothing but feeble or exaggerated fiction. Who can estimate the loss incurred by a generation growing up without this means of companionship with the master minds of all the ages, this resource and consolation in many dreary and painful hours? It is equalled only by the misfortune to the state, which must accord the privileges and entrust the duties of citizenship to men unable to grasp the real meaning of what they read, and naturally more likely to hear the talk of fanatics and demagogues than of sound thinkers.

This desuetude into which all but oral instruction has fallen is partly responsible for the inability of our school children to express facts or ideas, however elementary, in correct and clear English. Most of the pupils especially referred to in this article are of foreign parentage, coming from homes where, in many cases, English is not spoken, and where few if any of the children have been trained to regard speech in any language as an instrument of precision. All of them, however, with rare exceptions, being graduates of the public grammar schools, they must have been assiduously drilled in easy English exercises and repeatedly corrected for their most flagrant blunders in every-day talk. Yet they habitually employed the grotesquely ungrammatical expressions that were presented for correction in the grammars of our own childhood, impressing us then as inventions of an exuberant imagination, and never encountered in real life until the period of the experiences herein narrated.



After all, however, the most puzzling and disheartening phenomenon about these pupils was not their ignorance, but their imperviousness to advice or correction. The phrase as amended might, indeed, be repeated after the teacher, but with an air of tolerant and temporary concession to a comparatively harmless whim; and scarcely a case is on record of a pupil that overcame any of his confirmed faults of speech or showed a trace of embarrassment at having fallen again into the same error for which he had already been corrected, times without number.

An abstract standard of right and wrong was a thing disregarded in practice and unrecognized in theory—moral right and wrong as well as intellectual, alas! For in matters of conduct and character as well as lessons, the crucial test still was that of personal liking or aversion. A reproof for any species of misconduct was met by a more or less expanded form of the primitive statement, "I wanted to," and seldom indeed was it possible to convince a pupil that this ought not to be accepted as a complete exoneration. It is impossible to resist the conviction that such moral obtuseness and general irresponsibility on the part of these masses of boys and girls is a serious menace to society. The blame for it rests upon both the home and the school.

Probably many parents in this rank of life share with those of more critically trained judgment the conviction that as children they suffered much needless repression and some lack of sympathetic understanding, and that a happy childhood is the best blessing they can possibly bestow upon their own children. Many of them have expatriated themselves in quest of wider opportunities and less of irksome supervision and dictation. Many, having found no more freedom in the New World than in the Old, are filled with resentment and a spirit of revolt. "Liberty" has been made a household word and has fired the imaginations of the children. If these have not at the same time learned by precept and experience that liberty must always be circumscribed by law, their interpretation of the word is, naturally, unrestricted license.

Even in these homes some sort of obedience must be ex-

acted, but too often only that of a spasmodic character, forcibly compelled; and so the years bring not more self-control but only more triumphant resistance. The impulses which in the boys take the form of flaunting disobedience, impudence and general rowdyism, manifest themselves in the girls as pertness, frivolousness, and a fancied superiority to irksome obligations.

What these young people most need to learn is the dignity of labor and the fact that self-respect demands obedience to law—in short, the supremacy of duty over personal inclination. What they are learning is to do voluntarily only what they find agreeable and interesting, and to consider the fact that their work is hard or makes them nervous the best of reasons for neglecting it. They see themselves and their moods as the pivot of a complaisant social order—and for this distorted view of life the school system is seriously to blame.

The tremendous influx of the more ignorant and debased or turbulent classes of foreigners upon our shores has nearly swamped the public schools of our great cities with hordes of children whose home influences are on the side of neither culture nor morality, and whose proper training presents a problem before which the boldest educator may well shrink appalled. The children of these immigrants soon acquire a smattering of book lore that makes them, in their own eyes, wiser than their parents, and there the benefits of the school to them too often end. The modesty, the regard for the rights of others, the growing sense of responsibility for the performance of their own duties, that would be of untold value to them as individuals and as law-abiding citizens, their school training does very little to engender.

Too much stress can hardly be laid upon the lamentable effects of this absence of ideals. There is little hope of progress for him that has not something—yes, and somebody—to look up to. Let children be carefully taught to admire and reverence superiority of natural endowment, attainment and character, and the battle is half won. Even superior age is entitled to deference if there is reason to believe that the years have been well spent.

Here again the schools fail to perform their duty. Disobedience, impertinence, and total neglect of school duties are condoned because, forsooth, children are not adults. Flattery and weak concessions are so lavishly bestowed that the withholding of them is resented as an unpardonable injury. Principals and teachers unite in shielding their sensitive charges from all unpleasant consequences of indolence or perversity. For, though there are notable exceptions, the average school principal walks warily and deprecatingly, nervously anxious to please all the world—except his subordinates, the teachers, who may safely be ignored. These, in turn, must please their pupils, and thus incidentally the other sovereign powers, while the children fulfill their whole duty by the easy and congenial method of pleasing themselves. The alarming increase in the number of juvenile vagabonds and law-breakers and the kindly reception of anarchistic doctrines among adults are effects to which many causes have contributed, and even the schools, however noble their aims, can hardly regard the fruits of their labor with perfect complacency.

We hear a great deal at present about inculcating patriotism and *esprit de corps* upon school children, and we see much energetic metaphoric waving of the American flag, and hear it triumphantly reiterated that not only is this country the greatest on earth, but the particular school in question is its most wonderful repository and nursery of wisdom and virtue. The value of this form of patriotism is questionable, to put it mildly. Children need to be taught that their school is what they make it—not what they boast of its being—and that every instance of unruliness or slipshod work is a blot upon the lustre of its fame. As matters now stand, the average pupil assumes the superiority of his school and himself as fundamental in the nature of things, entailing no obligation and affording no inspiration, except to self-conceit, which is little in need of stimulus.

Among the pedagogical questions with reference to which sentiment has stifled the verdict of common sense is that of the promotion of pupils deficient in their studies. Let them go on, it is said; they will be sure to assimilate something as they

pass from grade to grade, and will be spared the humiliation of a visible failure. Now, if these delinquents were to be only passive hearers in the schoolroom, the injurious effects of so short-sightedly good-natured a policy might be confined chiefly to them. They would flounder along, out of their depth, indeed, but seeing gleams of light through the fog at times, it might be hoped, and felicitating themselves upon illustrating the inspiring truth that all pupils are created free and equal, and remain in that condition regardless of what they do or leave undone.

On the contrary, such children are to receive their due share of individual attention; the teacher must struggle to make clear to them what they are not qualified to understand, and must despairingly labor to remedy their deficiencies—all this at the expense of the class members in good and regular standing, who need the time and attention for their legitimate work, and are rightfully entitled to it. Against this positive loss and injustice the problematical benefit to those whose capacity or indolence has prevented their profiting by previous opportunities need not weigh very heavily.

Though it is necessary to retain in the schools many children whose presence is detrimental to the general good, and for whom the schools can do little, this state of things should not be allowed to continue after the age of compulsory school attendance is passed. Our higher schools should be for those that will profit by them. This by no means implies that pupils naturally dull should be excluded—they should simply be required to advance at a pace suited to their capacity. But the insubordinate and the persistently inattentive should not be allowed to remain where they waste the public money, demoralize the unstable, and get little or no benefit themselves. A rigid enforcement of this principle, without fear or favor, would do much to instill moral purpose into character during its formative period.

Discarding sentimentality, the juster and kinder course would be to tell children that they are not equal mentally, any more than physically, and that one must put forth more effort, or take more time to accomplish a desired result than another.

A slight infusion of the Stoic philosophy would greatly ennoble the views of life held by our school children. Tell them plainly that hard tasks simply call for more earnest endeavor; that they are at liberty to dislike certain work as heartily as they please, but that to offer this dislike as an excuse for leaving their work undone is to play a part unworthy of men and women. Even young children are capable of the conception of duty as a powerful dynamic force. If upon pupils of high-school age this conception has not dawned, they are in danger of developing into incompetent whiners at life's tasks, cowards under life's hardships, pitiable egotists, intellectual and moral invertebrates.

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### BOOK REVIEWS.

MOMENTA OF LIFE. Essays Ethical, Historical and Religious.  
By James Lindsay, D. D. (Glas.). London: Elliot Stock,  
1901. Pp. viii., 146.

This small volume contains essays on subjects of ethical and religious interest. I shall confine myself to those which deal more especially with ethics.

The first paper which deals with "The Development of Ethical Philosophy," discusses the question whether the enrichment of ethical content which the lapse of time has brought, involves also a corresponding development of the methods of ethics. Dr. Lindsay, it seems to me, lays far too much stress upon the relative backwardness of Greek ethics. If instead of taking Socrates (of whose moral standpoint we know with certainty comparatively little) as the type of a Greek ethical teacher, he had taken Plato or Aristotle, the contrast between the poverty of ancient speculation, and the wealth of modern speculation would have lost much of its effect. It is nearer the facts to say with Green: "In the development of that reflective morality which our own consciences inherit, both the fundamental principle and the mode of its articulation have retained the form which they first took in the minds of the Greek philosophers" (*Prolegomena to Ethics*,"